Statement of Chairman Henry Cuellar (D-TX) as prepared

Subcommittee on Border, Maritime, and Global Counterterrorism
Committee on Homeland Security

SBInet: Does It Pass the Border Security Test? Part II
June 17, 2010

Today, the subcommittees have come together to continue our examination of SBInet and discuss the findings of a new report from the Government Accountability Office. Almost three months ago, we heard from this same panel of witnesses on the Department's ongoing effort to deploy integrated-technology at our nation's borders.

The testimony was worrisome: The number of problems with SBInet was growing faster than the number being fixed. Testing procedures appeared to have been modified to help the system "pass the test" instead of ensuring the system delivered as promised.

The state of this program is not what was envisioned when it was initiated in 2006. At that time, DHS called SBInet a "strategic partnership" that would allow the Department "to exploit private sector ingenuity and expertise to quickly secure our nation's borders."[1]

Unfortunately, in the years since, SBInet has been plagued by poor planning, missed deadlines, technology issues, and inadequate oversight. I have the privilege of representing a district along the Southern Border and, as a result, I have been closely following SBInet's development and progress.

People along the Southern Border have been eagerly awaiting the additional support promised by SBInet in the face of growing violence. However, as the GAO's findings indicate, the promises made at the start of the program remain unfulfilled as the expected scope and capabilities of SBInet have continued to shrink over the last few years.

For example, the initial SBInet deployment was supposed to cover 655 miles and three border patrol sectors: Tucson, Yuma and El Paso. However, the initial deployment will now, at best, cover only 387 miles and include only Tucson and Yuma sectors. Over the last 15 months, the number of system requirements has dropped from 1286 to 880 or 32 percent.

The reductions to SBInet do not end there.

SBInet was created to strengthen the ability to detect, identify and respond to unauthorized entries. However, its performance capability has been relaxed. Under new thresholds, SBInet performance is acceptable if it identifies a mere 49 percent of items of interest. As even my two daughters know, 49 percent is not even close to a passing grade.

After numerous hearings and GAO reports since the inception of the program, it is my sincere hope that DHS can take the lessons learned and apply them in a meaningful way. After more than four years and approximately $1.3 billion, we need to get on the same page about what a technology solution at the border looks like.

I am curious to learn more about the status of the Department's ongoing assessment of SBInet and what it means for the future of the program. I commend Secretary Napolitano for undertaking this review.

Most importantly, I want to hear a commitment to doing more to secure our borders sooner rather than later, whether through additional personnel or proven technologies. Border communities, like those I represent, have waited long enough.

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[1] Michael Chertoff, DHS Secretary, "DHS Announces SBInet Contract Award to Boeing", Department of Homeland Security Press Release, September 21, 2006, available at [http://www.dhs.gov/xnews/releases/pr_1158876536376.shtm].